

Volunteer Monitoring Program Overview

Volunteer Monitoring Background

Utilizing trained volunteers to collect environmental data is a growing trend among public agencies and private groups across the country. Agency staff realize that they can expand limited resources by using trained volunteers, giving rise to the testing of more streams and lakes, more often. Over the years studies have demonstrated that data collected by volunteers can be credible and useful if volunteers are properly trained and equipped. The Clark County volunteer monitoring program is a good example of this trend. Citizens interested in the county's streams and lakes have volunteered their time to collect excellent water quality data. Staff from the county's Water Resources Program train, equip, and manage the activities of the volunteers and also guide their monitoring efforts. Data from the volunteer sites augments the water quality data collected by county staff and gives the county more information to manage natural resources. Funding for volunteer monitoring is provided by the Clark County Clean Water Program and Washington Department of Ecology Grants.

Volunteer Monitoring Goals

Volunteer monitoring is an integral part of Clark County's Clean Water Program, which has the overall goal of increasing protection for the county's streams, lakes, and groundwater. Monitoring data collected by volunteers is intended to accomplish the following goals:

1. Collect and report useful, credible data for describing current stream and lake conditions identify trends in watershed conditions, and screen for potential problems.
2. Report water quality information on a regular and timely basis to fellow volunteers, county staff, other agencies and organizations, and the general public.
3. Facilitate public involvement in stream and lake monitoring, and increase awareness of watershed issues.

Monitoring data is used to estimate the current condition of streams at the location sampled. The data is also intended to serve as a baseline for comparison in future studies. The benchmarks used to estimate the condition include comparing water quality data to standards set to protect aquatic life and calculating stream health ratings.

Overall Approach to Volunteer Monitoring

Clark County draws adult and student volunteers from the general public and also from organizations interested in the environment. For example, members of civic groups like the Clark County Watershed Stewards, Friends of the Ridgefield Wildlife Refuge, and Fish First are part of our volunteer teams. The focus of the county's volunteer monitoring program is to gather general water quality data rather than tracking specific conditions like storm events. Volunteers are organized into small teams and assigned to a particular stream reach where they monitor quarterly throughout the year. The volunteers follow a holistic approach to monitoring streams, considering the chemical aspects of the stream's water quality, as well as physical and biological parameters.

Volunteer Monitoring Locations

Volunteers monitor at various stream and lake locations selected by county staff (Figure 1). Monitoring activity at a particular location may end due to various constraints. As a result there is a varying list of active and inactive monitoring locations associated with the volunteer monitoring project (Figure 1).

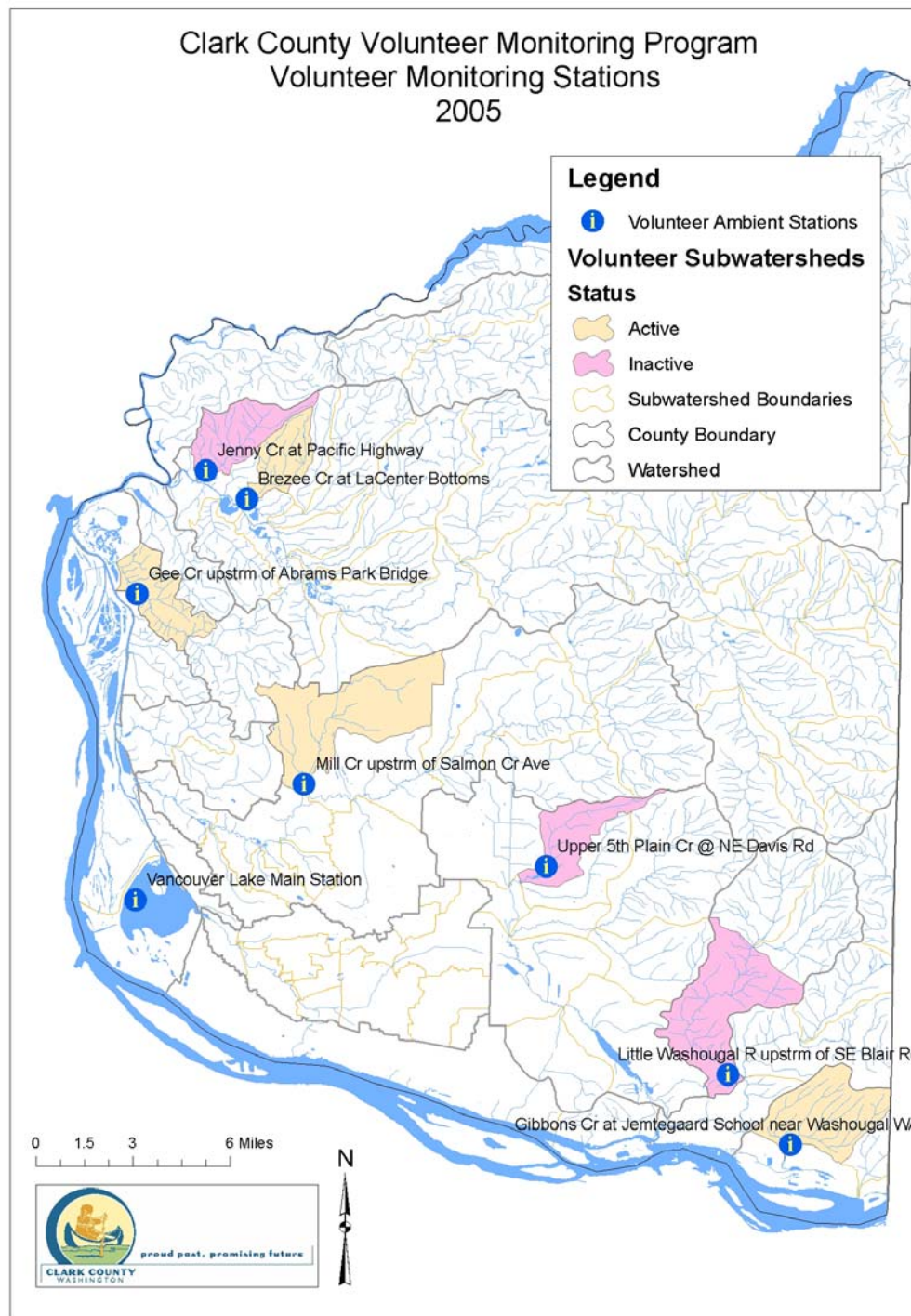


Figure1. Map of the stations and subwatersheds monitored by Clark County Volunteers as of spring 2005.